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A Chronicle History

By ANTHONY LEWIS

LONDON, Feb. 19 — For the last three years a journal called *A Chronicle of Current Events* has appeared about every two months in the Soviet Union. Its purpose is to tell the truth about political trials and the other ways in which dissenters are persecuted in the U.S.S.R.

The authors are naturally unknown. The *Chronicle* circulates only in typewritten copies. Nevertheless, when checked against other sources of information it has proved astonishingly accurate. It even corrects its own minor mistakes, as in the spelling of names, in subsequent issues.

Amnesty International, the London-based organization that worries about political prisoners all over the world, has now started to print the *Chronicle* in English translation on a regular periodical basis. It ought to be read not only by those with a professional interest but by anyone who wants to understand the nature of life in a totalitarian society.

What makes the *Chronicle* so impressive is its utter lack of melodrama. In the most matter-of-fact way it relates events that must horrify any reader of normal sensitivity. Its power is the power of simple truth.

Anatoly Marchenko, the Soviet author now in a labor camp, suffers from the effects of meningitis contracted during past imprisonment. The *Chronicle* reports: "In spite of the medical certificates attached to Marchenko's case about the grave state of his health, and his assignment to light work . . . he was made to live in a tent," with the temperature outside 45 to 50 degrees below freezing centigrade, "and detailed to work on the unloading of firewood for trains."

Y. M. Suslensky, 42 years old, a teacher in the Moldavian town of Bendery, wrote open letters to the Communist party Central Committee protesting the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia. He was arrested, and police searching his home found home-made tapes of B.B.C. broadcasts and a diary giving his ideas on freedom. In a trial before the Moldavian Supreme Court the prosecutor demanded a prison sentence of three years. The court gave him seven.

Many of the brief items concern matters less dramatic than prison camps and trials but hardly less disturbing in their vindictiveness.

"Daniel Davydovich Baril, chief engineer of the construction bureau for mechanical engineering in the ship-

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dismissed on grounds of redundancy. The reason for his dismissal was a verbal communication from the Department of Visas and Registrations to the effect that his son, Vladimir Baril, had been given permission to emigrate to Israel."

M. Y. Makarenko organized a literary club and picture gallery in a town near Novosibirsk. After exhibitions of modern artists at the gallery, Makarenko was dismissed as its manager.

"Makarenko's subsequent fate," the *Chronicle* says, "was determined by his persistent efforts to organize a Marc Chagall exhibition. Chagall had agreed to come to the U.S.S.R. and to provide canvases for it." Makarenko was arrested, tried and imprisoned for eight years on charges of anti-Soviet agitation, engaging in a forbidden means of livelihood and accepting a bribe.

There was the case of the woman arrested when a cleaner and mechanic making repairs to her room in a hostel found "typewritten material which appeared to members of the repair squad to be criminal." Another woman, an engineer, left a suitcase at the Leningrad railway station in Moscow. It was opened by a secret policeman, who confiscated articles she had written on assignment from *Izvestia* and another Communist paper.

Chronicle number 16, the first published by Amnesty, ends with an obituary of Prof. J. G. Oksman, historian and litterateur, who served a 10-year sentence of prison and exile but survived. In 1963, on suspicion of communicating with the West about banned Soviet writers, he was expelled from the writers' union.

"Since then," the *Chronicle* says, "his publications have either not appeared or have appeared under pseudonyms. His name is removed from finished works, and the censorship crosses out all mention of him. . . .

"It proved impossible to place a notice about J. G. Oksman's death in the Moscow press."

We in the West, as we read such things, realize how much liberty and decency we enjoy. We should have another reaction as well. That is to care about every encroachment on privacy and freedom of thought by the frightened superpatriots in our own societies, those whom Brandeis described as "men of zeal, well-meaning but with little vision."